



## Executioners sanitized accounts of deaths in federal cases

**CHICAGO (AP)** — Executioners who put 13 inmates to death in the last months of the Trump administration likened the process of dying by lethal injection to falling asleep and called gurneys "beds" and final breaths "snores." But those tranquil accounts are at odds with reports by The Associated Press and other media witnesses of how prisoners' stomachs rolled, shook and shuddered as the pentobarbital took effect inside the U.S. penitentiary death chamber in Terre Haute, Indiana. The AP witnessed every execution. The sworn accounts by executioners, which government filings cited as evidence the lethal injections were going smoothly, raise questions about whether officials misled courts to ensure

the executions scheduled from July to mid-January were done before death penalty opponent Joe Biden became president. Secrecy surrounded all aspects of the executions. Courts relied on those carrying them out to volunteer information about glitches. None of the executioners mentioned any. Questions about whether inmates' midsections trembled as media witnesses described were a focus of litigation throughout the run of executions. Inmates' lawyers argued it proved pentobarbital caused flash pulmonary edema, in which fluid rushes through quickly disintegrating membranes into lungs and airways, causing pain akin to being suffocated or drowned.

Continued on next page



This March 22, 1995, file photo shows the interior of the execution chamber in the U.S. Penitentiary in Terre Haute, Ind.

Associated Press

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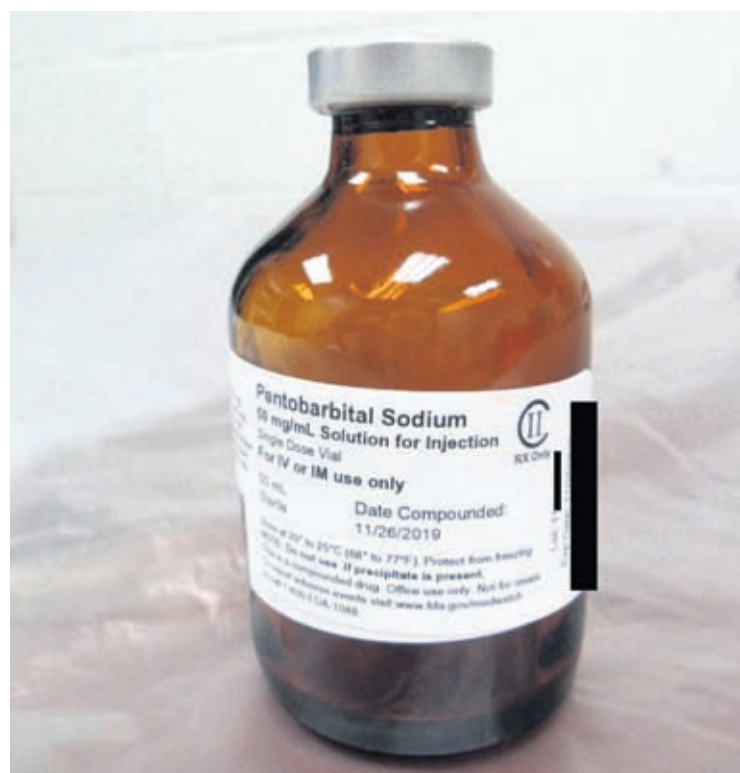


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This photo provided by the U.S. Department of Justice shows a vial of pentobarbital used in the executions of two inmates in July 2020, according to court filings.

Associated Press

**Continued from Front** The U.S. Constitution prohib-

its execution methods that are "cruel and unusual."

The discrepancies could increase pressure on Biden to declare his administration won't execute any of the roughly 50 federal inmates still on death row. Activists want him to go further by backing a bill abolishing the federal death penalty. Biden hasn't spoken about any specific action. During the Sept. 22 execution of William LeCroy, convicted of killing Georgia nurse Joann Lee Tiesler in 2001, the 50-year-old's stomach area heaved uncontrollably immediately after the pentobarbital injection. It lasted about a minute, according to the AP and other reports. Executioner Eric Williams stood next to LeCroy as he died. But Williams made only cursory reference to "the rise and fall" of LeCroy's abdomen in his account. Shortly after serving in five of the recent execu-

tions, Williams was named the interim warden of the high-profile New York City lockup where Jeffrey Epstein died in 2019. "During the entirety of the execution, LeCroy did not appear to be in any sort of distress, discomfort, or pain," Williams wrote. "A short time after he took a deep breath and snored, it appeared to me that LeCroy was in a deep, comfortable sleep." The distinctive jerking and jolting was visible in at least half the executions, according to the AP and other media accounts. Among multiple executioner accounts, none described any such movements. All employed the same sleep metaphors. When Donald Trump's Justice Department announced in 2019 it'd resume executions after a 17-year hiatus, it said it would use pentobarbital alone. Manufacturers were no longer willing to supply the combination of drugs used in three federal executions from 2001 to 2003, explaining they didn't want drugs meant to save lives to be used for killing. One point of contention during the litigation was whether, even if pulmonary edema did occur, inmates could feel it after they appeared to be knocked out. Experts for the prisoners said the drug paralyzes the body, masking the pain prisoners could feel as they died. None of those executed appeared to writhe in pain. But audio from the death chamber to the media viewing room was switched off just prior to the injections, so journalists couldn't hear if inmates groaned or complained of pain. William Breeden, a spiritual adviser in the chamber when 52-year-old Corey Johnson was executed on Jan. 14 after his 1992

conviction of killing seven people, said in a filing the next day that "Corey said his hands and mouth were burning" after the injection. Federal Bureau of Prisons attorney Rick Winter said in response that neither he nor anyone in a government witness room heard that. Some pain doesn't necessarily mean an execution method violates prohibitions against "cruel and unusual" punishment, the Supreme Court ruled in 2019. The Constitution, the 5-4 majority opinion said, "does not guarantee a prisoner a painless death — something that, of course, isn't guaranteed to many people." Government lawyers, eager to carry on and avoid any potential delays, sought to discredit the journalists' accounts. In an Oct. 8 filing, government expert Kendall Von Crowns, who didn't witness the executions, relied on executioners' descriptions to suggest journalists misperceived what they saw. He noted that LeCroy's executioner "does not state that there was any irregular or uncontrolled heaving." It was more likely, he said, that journalists saw "hyperventilation due to the anxiety associated with his impending death." The Federal Bureau of Prisons declined to comment on why lawyers representing the agency relied on experts who had not observed executions in person and whether executioners' statements may have misled courts. In an evidentiary hearing in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 18 — when eight executions had yet to be carried out — government attorneys objected when inmates' lawyers asked Crowns about media reports of midsection movements in three of the first five executions. □

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# U.S. govt seizes over 10M phony N95 masks in COVID-19 probe

By COLLEEN LONG

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — Federal agents have seized more than 10 million fake 3M brand N95 masks in recent weeks, the result of an ongoing investigation into counterfeits sold in at least five states to hospitals, medical facilities and government agencies. The most recent seizures occurred Wednesday when Homeland Security agents intercepted hundreds of thousands of counterfeit 3M masks in an East Coast warehouse that were set to be distributed, officials said. Investigators also notified about 6,000 potential victims in at least 12 states including hospitals, medical facilities and others who may have unknowingly purchased knockoffs, urging them to stop using the medical-grade masks. Officials encouraged medical workers and companies to go to 3M's website for tips on how to spot fakes. "Not only do they give a false sense of security, how

dangerous is the exposed individual without any protective gear? They have no utility whatsoever," Homeland Security Secretary Ali Mayorkas said of the fake masks.

The masks do not come through 3M's regular distributors, they come from outside the normal supply chain, officials said. But hospitals and medical groups have increasingly gone around normal purchasing routines during mask shortages in the global pandemic, officials said. They said the scams are taking advantage of the panic over masks.

Homeland Security officials would not say which states the phony masks were sent to, but said criminal charges would be forthcoming. The phony masks are not tested to see whether they meet strict N95 standards and could put frontline medical workers at risk if they are used while treating patients with COVID-19. Nearly a year into the pan-



This December 2020 image provided by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) shows counterfeit N95 surgical masks that were seized by ICE and U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Associated Press

demic, fraud remains a major problem as scammers seek to exploit hospitals and desperate Americans. Federal investigators say they have seen an increase in phony websites purporting to sell vaccines as well as fake medicine produced overseas and scams involving personal protective equipment. The

schemes deliver phony products, unlike earlier in the pandemic when fraudsters focused more on fleecing customers.

3M, based in Maplewood, Minnesota, is among the largest global producers of the N95 mask, which has been approved by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and

Health. It is considered the gold standard in protection against the coronavirus. The company delivered some 2 billion N95 masks in 2020 as the pandemic intensified, but in the earlier months, when masks were in short supply, fraudsters took advantage.

So far during the pandemic Homeland Security Investigations has used its 7,000 agents, along with border officials, the Food and Drug Administration and the FBI, to investigate the scams, seizing \$33 million in phony products and arresting more than 200 people. The effort is based at the National Intellectual Property Rights Coordination Center, a government watchdog aimed at enforcing international trade laws and combating intellectual property theft.

Over the past two weeks, federal agents have executed search warrants and seized masks in five different states, and more action is expected. □

# South Carolina House passes bill banning most abortions

By JEFFREY COLLINS

**COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP)** — The South Carolina House on Wednesday overwhelmingly passed a bill banning nearly all abortions, following the lead of other states with similar measures that would go into effect if the U.S. Supreme Court were to overturn Roe v. Wade. The proposal passed the Senate on Jan. 28. It faces a final procedural vote in the House on Thursday that likely won't change the outcome and will then be sent to the governor for his signature. Republican Gov. Henry McMaster has promised to sign the measure as soon as possible. The "South Carolina Fetal Heartbeat and Protection from Abortion Act" requires doctors to perform ultrasounds to check for a heartbeat in the fetus. If one is detected, the abortion can only be performed if the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest or the mother's life is in danger.

About a dozen other states have passed similar or more restrictive abortion bans, which could take effect if the U.S. Supreme Court — with three justices appointed by Republican former President Donald Trump — were to overturn Roe v. Wade, the 1973 court decision supporting abortion rights.

Groups that oppose the bill will likely sue, keeping the law from going into effect. All of the bans passed by other states are tied up in court challenges. Nearly all members of the Democratic caucus walked out in protest at one point. A few Democrats stayed behind as Republicans wiped out more than 100 proposed amendments. After holding a news conference to speak against the bill, several other Democrats returned to express their opposition to the measure, which has come up for debate in the legislature numerous times over the past decade.

Nearly all House members were later present for the vote, which was 79-35 in favor.

"You love the fetus in the womb. But when it is born, it's a different reaction," said Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter of Orangeburg, the House's longest serving member at 29 years.

Numerous Republican lawmakers spoke in favor of the bill and many cheered after the vote. Supporters of the ban stood outside the House chambers applauding and hugging the lawmakers that pushed the hardest for the measure.

Rep. Melissa Lackey Oremus said plenty of women have mixed feelings when they get pregnant, especially when they aren't where they want to be in their life. But the Republican from Aiken said that's no reason for abortion.

"They don't deserve to die just because their mother made a bad choice one night," Oremus said during the debate.



Melissa Anne "Mac" Cunningham-Sereque shows the wand used to do ultrasound on pregnant women during a South Carolina House subcommittee hearing on an abortion bill on Wednesday, Feb. 3, 2021, in Columbia, S.C.

Associated Press

For years, the bill has failed to pass the Senate. But Republicans gained three seats in the 2020 elections and the newly energized 30-16 Republican majority made the proposal Senate Bill No. 1 and finally pushed it over a procedural hurdle. Republicans have urged people who want to see even more restrictions put on abortion to avoid changing the bill to make

sure it passes. The only change was in the Senate to add exemptions for pregnancies caused by rape and incest.

The bill would not punish a pregnant woman for getting an illegal abortion, but the person who performed the abortion could be charged with a felony, sentenced up to two years and fined \$10,000 if found guilty. □



# U.S. charges North Korean computer programmers in global hacks



This wanted poster released by the Department of Justice shows Kim Il, who prosecutors say is a member of a North Korean military intelligence agency and carried out hacks at the behest of the government with a goal of using pilfered funds for the benefit of the regime.

Associated Press

By ERIC TUCKER  
Associated Press

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — The Justice Department has charged three North Korean computer programmers in a broad range of global hacks, including a destructive attack targeting an American movie studio and an extortion scheme aimed at attempting to steal more than \$1.3 billion from banks and other financial institutions, federal prosecutors said Wednesday. The newly unsealed indictment builds off an earlier criminal case brought in 2018 and adds two additional North Korean defendants. Prosecutors identified all three as members of a North Korean military intelligence agency and

said they carried out hacks at the behest of the government with a goal of using stolen funds for the benefit of the regime. Alarmingly to U.S. officials, the defendants worked at times from locations in Russia and China.

Law enforcement officials say the prosecution underscores the profit-driven motive behind the North Korean criminal hacking model, a contrast from other adversarial nations like Russia, China and Iran who are generally more interested in espionage, intellectual property theft or even disrupting democracy. As the U.S. announced its case against the North Koreans, the government was still grappling with an intrusion by Russia of federal agencies and private corporations that officials say was aimed at information-gathering.

"What we see emerging uniquely out of North Korea is trying to raise funds through illegal cyber activities," including the theft of traditional and cryptocurrency, as well as cyber extortion schemes, said Assistant Attorney General John Demers, the Justice Department's top national security official.

Because of their economic system and sanctions imposed on the country, he added, "They use their cyber capabilities to try to get currency wherever they can do that, and that's not something that we really see from actors in China or Russia or in Iran."

None of the three defendants is in American custody, and though officials don't expect them to travel to the U.S. anytime soon for prosecution, Justice Department officials in recent years have found value in indicting foreign government hackers even in absentia as a message that they are not anonymous and can be identified and implicated in crimes.

At the same time, prosecutors announced a plea deal with a dual U.S.-Canadian citizen who investigators say organized the laundering of millions of dollars in stolen funds. Ghaleb Alaumary, 37, of Ontario, Canada, has agreed to plead guilty in Los Angeles to organizing teams of co-conspirators in the U.S. and Canada to launder funds obtained through various schemes.

Besides naming two additional defendants beyond the original 2018 case, the new case also adds to the list of victims from around the world of hacks carried out by the Reconnaissance General Bureau.

The hackers, according to the indictment, were part of a conspiracy that attempted to steal more than \$1.3 billion of money and cryptocurrency from banks and companies; unleashed a global sweeping ransomware campaign; and hacks that targeted Sony Pictures Entertainment in 2014 in retaliation for a Hollywood movie, "The Interview," that the North Korean government didn't like.

The indictment says the hackers engaged not just in cybertheft but also in "revenge-motivated computer attacks, at times executing commands "to destroy computer systems, deploy ransomware" or otherwise render victims' computers inoperable.

"The scope of these crimes by the North Korean hackers is staggering," said Tracy Wilkison, the acting U.S. Attorney in the Central District of California, where Sony Pictures is located and where the indictment was filed. "They are the crimes of a nation-state that has stopped at nothing to extract revenge and to obtain money to prop up a machine."

Officials would not say how much money the hackers actually obtained, though the indictment does charge them in connection with an \$81 million theft from Bangladesh's central bank in 2016 and with multiple other multi-million-dollar ATM cashouts and cyber extortion schemes. All told, the conspirators "attempted to steal or extort more than \$1.3 billion," according to the indictment.

To empty the cryptocurrency accounts of victims, the cyberthieves seeded malware posing as cryptocurrency-trading software on legitimate-seeming websites to trick victims, according to an alert published by the FBI and other U.S. agencies. Once infected, a victim's computer could be entered and controlled by remote access. Later, hackers used other techniques including phishing and social engineering to infect victims' computers. □

## Thousands of cold-stunned sea turtles being rescued in Texas



Thousands of Atlantic green sea turtles and Kemp's ridley sea turtles suffering from cold stun are laid out to recover Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021 at the South Padre Island Convention Center on South Padre Island, Texas.

Associated Press

**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND, Tex.** — Residents, some

of whom lack heat or basic amenities in their own homes due to the unusually chilly weather, have been rescuing cold-stunned sea turtles and taking them to a convention center in a South Texas resort town.

"Every 15 minutes or less there's another truck or SUV that pulls up," Ed Caum, executive director of the South Padre Island Convention and Visitors Bureau, told The Associated Press on Wednesday. He said sometimes people bring one or two sea turtles, sometimes more. "We had trailers full yesterday coming in that had 80, 100, 50,"

he said. The South Padre Island Convention Center started pitching in Monday when it's neighbor, Sea Turtle Inc., could no longer handle the number of sea turtles being dropped off, and their mostly outdoor operation had lost power. He said the convention center itself didn't have power or water till early Wednesday morning. He says they've "collected" more than 3,500 sea turtles so far. He said he hesitates to use the word rescued because "we know we're going to lose some." Caum said that with another cold front approach-

ing, they don't know when they'll be able to return the sea turtles to the water.

Temperatures in the area on Wednesday afternoon were in the 40s. He said it may be Saturday — when temperatures are expected to reach the low 60s (above 15 Celsius) — before the turtles can be released back into the Gulf. He said with power returned they have been able to bring the convention center's temperature to 60 degrees.

"We're trying to do the best we can to save as many turtles as possible," he said. □



# China steps up online controls with new rule for bloggers

By H. WU and FU TING

Associated Press

**TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP)** — Ma Xiaolin frequently wrote about current affairs on one of China's leading microblogging sites, where he has 2 million followers. But recently, he said in a post, the Weibo site called and asked him not to post original content on topics ranging from politics to economic and military issues. "As an international affairs researcher and a columnist, it looks like I can only go the route of entertainment, food and beverage now," the international relations professor wrote on Jan. 31.

Ma, who often posted on developments in the Mideast, is one of many popular influencers working within the constraints of China's heavily censored web who is finding that their space to speak is shrinking even further with the latest policy changes and a clean-up campaign run by the country's powerful censors. He declined an interview request.

Beginning next week, the Cyberspace Administration of China will require bloggers and influencers to have a government-approved credential before they can publish on a wide range of subjects. Some



Commuters wearing face masks to help curb the spread of the coronavirus browse their smartphones inside a subway train in Beijing Wednesday, Feb. 10, 2021.

Associated Press

fear that only state media and official propaganda accounts will get permission. While permits have been needed since at least 2017 to write about topics such as political and military affairs, enforcement has not been widespread. The new rules expand that requirement to health, economics, education and judicial matters.

"The regulators want to control the entire procedure of information production," said Titus Chen, an expert in Chinese social

media policy at National Sun Yat-Sen University in Taiwan.

The latest move is in line with ever more restrictive regulations under President Xi Jinping that constrict an already narrow space for discourse. The Chinese leader has made "digital sovereignty" a central concept of his rule, under which authorities have set limits and increased control of the digital realm.

The new credential requirement could restrict individuals from posting original

content, including people like Ma who aren't openly challenging the line of Xi's ruling Communist Party. Weibo CEO Wang Gaofei, responding to Ma on the platform, said commentary on news released by official media was permitted but commentators could not "release news" themselves. The policy revision is meant "to standardize and steer public accounts and information service platforms to be more self aware in keeping the correct direction of public opinion,"

according to a statement posted by the Cyberspace Administration.

A week after unveiling the new rules in late January, the administration held a nationwide conference on the importance of "strengthening order in online publishing." The head of the agency, Zhuang Rongwen, said the agency must "let our supervision and management grow teeth."

On Feb. 4, the agency publicly announced a month-long clean-up drive targeting search engines, social media platforms and browsers. Such campaigns, in which companies take steps to meet government demands, aren't new, but enforcement was looser in the past: In 2017, Weibo backed off after complaints it was lumping gay content in with a pornography ban.

It appears to be happening in concurrence with a crackdown to enforce existing rules.

"It is a big deal, it's a massive campaign," said Xiao Qiang, an expert on digital censorship at the University of California at Berkeley. "And these are people who didn't write something sharp. They are intentionally not being edgy about things." □

## 33 injured, 14 arrested in protests over rapper's jailing

**MADRID (AP)** — Police in Spain say 14 people were arrested in violent street protests in several cities fol-

lowing the arrest of Spanish rap artist Pablo Hasél, who had barricaded himself at a university with dozens of

supporters to avoid prison and defend his fight for free speech.

Emergency services said Wednesday that 33 people were treated for injuries in the disturbances. In the northeastern city of Barcelona, thousands of protestors set trash cans on fire and threw rocks at the police. Several stores and a bank were damaged amid chaotic scenes on one of the city's main streets.

Spanish National Television cited city authorities as estimating the damages at 70,000 euros (\$84,000).

Smaller demonstrations took place in other Span-

ish cities. Further protests are planned Wednesday. A 24-hour standoff between police and Hasél ended early Tuesday when anti-riot officers arrested him in northeastern Lleida University.

He was taken to prison to serve a 9-month sentence for insulting the monarchy and glorifying terrorism in a song about former King Juan Carlos I and in 64 tweets.

His case has drawn much attention, with many artists, celebrities and politicians showing their support and demanding a change in the country's so-called "gag law."

Spain's left-wing coalition government last week said it planned to change the country's criminal code to eliminate prison terms for offenses involving freedom of expression.

The rapper has previously faced charges for assault, praising armed extremist groups, breaking into private premises or insulting the monarchy.

Amnesty International said Hasél's case was the latest in a string of trials of artists and social media personalities in Spain under its 2015 Public Security Law, which was put into effect by a conservative government. □



Demonstrators clash with police after a protest condemning the arrest of rap singer Pablo Hasél in Barcelona, Spain, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021.

Associated Press



# Heavy snowfall, gales as winter storm hits Middle East

By SARAH EL DEEB

Associated Press

**BEIRUT (AP)** — Snow blanketed parts of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel on Wednesday, covering areas it has not reached in years, disrupting traffic and postponing vaccination campaigns against COVID-19 and even exams at some universities.

It snowed for the first time in years in Marjayoun in southern Lebanon, and in Bayda in northeast Libya.

Gale force winds knocked out electricity in vast parts of Lebanon, forcing many Lebanese, already used to power cuts, to rely on generators for longer hours. Rescuers pulled four motorists out of their snow-covered cars, the National News Agency said.

The first snow this winter in the Syrian capital, Damascus, did not prevent the Premier League soccer tournament from going ahead, as Army Sports Club and Al-Karamah faced off despite the snow that covered the pitch, the Syrian Al-Watan daily reported.



In this photo released by the Syrian official news agency SANA, people walk on a street as snow falls, in Damascus, Syria, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021.

In the mountains of Syria's Sweida province, snow was as high as 15 cm (6 inches), according to the official state news agency SANA. Roads in some provinces were blocked. In the central province of Hama, bulldozers shoveled snow to

open roads while vehicles skidded on ice, causing traffic disruption.

The University of Damascus called off mid-term exams scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday in all its branches around Syria because of the extreme

weather conditions. The country's ports remained open. In the opposition-held northwestern Syria, civil defense teams have been building dirt mounds since Tuesday around camps for the displaced to prevent rain from flooding

the crowded areas. Nearly 3 million displaced people live in northwestern Syria, mostly in tents and temporary shelters. Heavy rainfall last month damaged over 190 displacement sites, destroying and damaging over 10,000 tents.

In neighboring Lebanon, Storm Joyce hit late Tuesday with gale force winds registering between 85 km/h (52 miles/h) and 100 km/h (62 miles/h). The storm is expected to get stronger Thursday.

Breaking a warm spell, the storm brought heavy rainfall, a sharp drop in temperatures and the heaviest snow fall in Lebanon this year. Snow is expected to cover areas of altitudes as low as 400 meters, according to the meteorological department. Nearly a dozen roads in eastern and northern Lebanon were closed to traffic because of the snow. A beachside club and restaurant were submerged in water as waves nearly 4 meters (13 feet) high slammed onto the shore. □

Associated Press

## Philippine president approves amnesty program for rebels

By JIM GOMEZ

Associated Press

**MANILA, Philippines (AP)**

— The Philippine president has approved an amnesty program for Muslim and communist rebels who would agree to surrender their weapons as they return to normal life in the latest such attempt to tame rural insurgencies that have raged for half a century.

Thousands of guerrillas belonging to two large Muslim groups in the country's south and a communist rebel faction could apply for the amnesty within a year after it gets approved by Congress, according to President Rodrigo Duterte's signed orders made public late Tuesday. The three rebel groups have signed separate peace deals with Duterte's predecessors which have eased decades of fighting but have not been

fully enforced due to unresolved issues. Leaders of the largest armed group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, have been put in charge temporarily of administering a new Muslim autonomous region in the south while thousands of its fighters are disarmed. "It's welcome as long as it's based on our peace agreement," Moro Islamic Liberation Front spokesman Von Al Haq told The Associated Press by telephone.

He said that his rebel group's peace deal with the government provides for a general amnesty with an agreed manner of "decommissioning," a subtle term for disarming thousands of its combatants in batches depending largely on government compliance with the peace pact.

Duterte also agreed to include former insurgents

who once belonged to the main communist New People's Army in his amnesty program.

He labeled the NPA a "terrorist group" in his amnesty proclamation. His administration's peace talks with the Marxist group collapsed after both sides accused each other of launching attacks despite peace negotiations brokered by Norway.

The 75-year-old Duterte has promised to resolve Muslim and communist insurgencies before he leaves office. His six-year term ends in June next year.

"There is a need to reintegrate as soon as possible all rebels and insurgents into the mainstream society under the rule of law, including those who may have committed unlawful acts," Duterte said in his amnesty proclamation. The amnesty "shall extin-

guish any criminal liability for acts committed in pursuit of political beliefs" and restore political and civil rights, which were lost due to criminal conviction, the proclamation said.

The amnesty would not cover kidnappings for ransom, massacres, rape, terrorism, drug trafficking and

certain crimes the U.N. says should never be covered by amnesties, such as genocide, crimes against humanity and torture.

The amnesty program excludes the notoriously brutal Abu Sayyaf and other small armed bands associated with the Islamic State group. □



In this Monday, Feb. 15, 2021, photo provided by the Malacanang Presidential Photographers Division, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte gestures as he meets members of the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Emerging Infectious Diseases in Davao city, southern Philippines.

Associated Press



# French Caribbean fights to keep pesticide case alive

By DÁNICA COTO

Associated Press

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP)

— Agricultural workers who have long sought compensation for contamination from a pesticide banned in France but used in the country's Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe have finally had a day in court after a nearly 15-year wait.

Investigating magistrates in Paris held a videoconference hearing last month with representatives of consumer, farm and environmental groups gathered in a Martinique courtroom to determine how to proceed on a complaint that had languished since 2006.

"I have never given up," said attorney Harry Durimel, speaking in a phone interview from Guadeloupe. "This is a serious matter that merits everyone's involvement." The complaint focuses on chlordecone, a pesticide also known as Kepone that was banned in the U.S. in 1976 following several notorious incidents, including the contamination of the James



In this Nov. 18, 2007 photo, lawyer Harry Durimel, right, stands next to an activist with a sign that reads in French "No to Chlordecone poison," as they protest during the arrival of the French government's Health Minister Roselyne Bachelot in Raizet Abymes, Guadeloupe.

Associated Press

River in Virginia, and which is blamed for neurological problems including slurred speech. French health authorities have expressed concern it could be linked to high rates of prostate cancer on the eastern Caribbean islands and some studies have suggested it

may be linked to premature births.

It was legally marketed in France from 1981 until 1990 and was used for three more years in Guadeloupe and Martinique to fight the banana weevil under an exemption granted by the French government.

Durimel and other attorneys argue that exemption was illegal. The suit accuses the French government of failing to protect the health of its people and not doing enough to identify and limit the effects of chlordecone pollution on both islands, with a combined popula-

tion of some 750,000. "They poisoned us in silence," Durimel said. France's Ministry of the Overseas did not return a request for comment. Durimel said France considers the pesticide to be so risky that in October 2002, it ordered the incineration of 1.5 tons of sweet potatoes that arrived at the port of Dunkirk from Martinique because they contained chlordecone. In Martinique, authorities temporarily banned fishing in all rivers and some coastal areas in 2009 after finding nearly all fish sampled were still contaminated. U.S. studies in the James River found tainted fish decades after Kepone was banned. French officials had earlier prohibited the sale of any goods containing chlordecone and ordered that all soil be analyzed before the cultivation of root vegetables. But the complaint says those measures were not enforced and did not carry heavy penalties. In 2002, authorities seized several tons of chlordecone in Martinique and Guadeloupe. □

## Colombia builds inflatable domes for coronavirus patients

By MANUEL RUEDA

Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP)

— A shortage of hospital beds during the coronavirus pandemic has led architects in Colombia to design portable, inflatable chambers for coro-

navirus patients that can be placed in gyms or parking lots.

The domes — each 5 meters (16-feet) wide — can house two patients and are connected by inflatable hallways.

Tubes help circulate air,

which can cycle through 16 times an hour, according to the architects.

Developers around the world have devised other inflatable or pop-up structures to cope with the wave of COVID-19 patients, some for small wards, others for a few patients and some for individuals. The version at Bogota's La Salle University includes eight, interconnected domes that can house 16 patients, and costs around \$15,000, according to researchers.

Units can be added or subtracted as needed. "We wanted to do something to respond to the health emergency the world is going through" said Alex Perez, an architecture professor who led the dome initiative. □



Designers stand inside one of their Portable Epidemiological Isolation Unit during a media presentation, in Bogota, Colombia, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021.

Associated Press

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## The Cultural and Creative Industry: It's Time to Invest

**ORANJESTAD —** The creative industries as we know it, including the numerous niche market sectors like visual art, performing art, crafts, design, film, entertainment, music, publishing, gastronomy, and technology employs millions of people across the world. In Aruba the call has been done to start the initiative of developing our own distinct ecology, but until now it has been proven to be more difficult and complex. One of the main complaints from the field aside from the lack of leadership in this process, is that financing is almost impossible to come by. In the Aruban case, funding could then be interpreted as being limited, especially if you as an artist have exploited all local funding schemes available to you. This in return does not stimulate an unstructured economy to formalize itself. Now with the emergence of Covid-19 when will we proudly say; Aruba has its own Cultural & Creative Economy?

Building a new economy from scratch sounds so intimidating, lots of work and almost impossible considering the times we live in and the socio-economic challenges we are facing due to a global pandemic. It may sound a bit crazy to think and say that focusing on the Creative Industry should be our priority, but if not now, then when?

One of the leading countries and a great best practice example is the United Kingdom. The UK has been a trailblazer in developing their creative industries and has shown growth over the years. According to the Creative Industries Federation (2015) "Britain's creative success is based on a combination of public and private investment – including vital government support for national cultural institutions, the BBC and the Arts Councils, along with the National Lottery and significant regional and local invest-

ment". Finding funding schemes to support the Creative Industries has been a goal for many developing countries, especially small island states such as Aruba. The Creative Industries Federation (CIF) proposes for countries to fund their creative industries through; public investment, philanthropic support and corporate partnerships, and private capital.

### Public Investment

Public investment is one of the most critical components in this list of funding schemes, but high dependency on it will lead to frustration. By investing in culture, social capital, and creative industries as drivers of social development the Aruban government can stimulate the results that contribute to the overall wellbeing of communities, by providing economic growth and encouraging social cohesion (UN, 2020). The Aruban government could increase the support offered to businesses to protect and exploit intellectual property. Another important role of local government is matching private and public investment, which will deliver a 'ladder of growth' to the local economy. We don't need the government to control the



development, we need the government to provide the steps that lead to greater sustained growth, while the work is being executed by the creative professionals and entrepreneurs. Local governments can be also active in the field of co-financing project with the private investors (Fazlagic and Szczepankiewicz, 2020).

Additional 'spill-over' benefits of public investment to the wider economy include the development of skills, innovation, advancing national productivity and ex-

ports in the creative workforce, economic and community rejuvenation. They make a major contribution to sectors such as high-technology, manufacturing, retail, leisure and even tourism. In Aruba, tourism and its close relationship to culture and the CCI's has been identified as a possible dynamic that could further advance itself into scenarios where Aruba could market itself to attract visitors that are more interested in a creative and cultural experience. As John Sorrel, chairman of the CIF once stated (2015) "Publicly funded arts organizations act as the R&D for the creative industries – both for new concepts and for people".

### Philanthropic support and corporate partnerships

Philanthropy has been one of the most underrated means of funding in the creative industry and has had a great impact on the survival of many cultural and creative organizations. However, corporate sponsors of the arts and culture often have important aims beyond philanthropy when they provide financial support.



Continued on Page 9



# The Cultural and Creative Industry: It's Time to Invest

Continued from Page 8

The business benefits of sponsorship culture and

## Biography Thaïs Franken



Thaïs G. Franken (25) is a local academic researcher and is currently teaching at the University of Aruba in the Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS). She is a graduate of the University of Maastricht (UM) and the United Nations University Maastricht Economic and Social Research Institute on Innovation and Technology (UNU-MERIT) where she obtained her double Master of Science degree in Public Policy and Human Development with a specialization in Innovation, Institutions and Development. She has been researching the Aruban Creative Industry for quite some time and has collaborated with several local cultural NGOs to bring awareness of the possible impact of the Creative Industry on the island. It was her research on the "Socio-economic and Cultural Impact of the Creative Industry of the Aruban Sustainable Development" that inspired the emergence of the "Creative Islander" column back in 2018. Thaïs is very passionate about topics such as sustainability, innovation, culture, creativity, cultural heritage, education, social entrepreneurship and their role in public management. Next to her academic interests, she enjoys reading, writing, dancing and cooking.

the arts include marketing, business development, public relations and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The creative sector and especially in Aruba is looking for more engagement by local business in general for sharing not only their expertise and advice, but their financial support as well. This is to ensure that they have the strongest possible combination of artistic, business and financial expertise on which to draw. Next to this, for those new creative ventures or smaller projects rewards-based crowdfunding has emerged in the past few years as another potential route to development funding. However, legal and infrastructural systems are still not in place on the

island to fully support this type of funding scheme. The Aruban way of crowdfunding is to stand at the local supermarket to ask for donations, but in 2021 this should not be the case anymore. We should consider improving the system and introduce financial means with the use of technology to facilitate this process better.

### Private capital

Raising capital to invest in a new creative business seems almost impossible with the current structures we have in place. The only ways of raising capital for a new business or venture would be from personal resources, from the profits of an existing business, from a government grant,



from a bank, or from private investors. But while good personal networks and personal capital are still a big advantage when launching a new endeavor, other roads to raising funding for business growth have increased in variety and number. Banks have always been relatively risk averse, and some might even tend to avoid creative ventures. Many local creatives express that it is impossible for them to get

a bank loan to open their business, because maybe their business plan is not effective, or the return of investment is not feasible, or simply because Aruba does not see this sector as a viable economic option. We need to have consensus between the government, private sector, academia and civil society on the role we want the creative industry to have on the island.

Continued on Page 10

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## Covid-19: the status on Aruba

**ORANJESTAD —** A year after the 1st case of Covid-19 hit the island and was completely shut down for 3.5 months, Aruba's tourism and economy is picking up bit by bit. Borders had been reopened for US travelers, Europeans, and as per December 1st, 2020 we welcomed back our visitors of Latin America, South America and the rest of the Caribbean with the exception of Venezuela. Rules and protocols are being reviewed and evaluated on a daily basis and adapted as per current situation by a crisis team, in order to protect each and every one visiting and inhabiting our island.

To increase safety measures for the health and wellbeing of travelers and our locals, beginning January 25th, 2021, residents of Brazil are unable to travel to Aruba due to the new variant of the COVID-19 now present in Brazil. This does not apply to visitors residing outside of Brazil who travel on a Brazilian passport. Residents of Brazil wishing to travel to Aruba are encouraged to check Aruba.com frequently as updates will be shared in the near future.

### Covid cases

There are currently (as per February 17th, closing of this edition) 261 active Covid cases on the island. 202 residents and 59 non-residents. There are 15 persons hospitalized of which 4 of them are in the Intensive care unit. A total of 71.418 persons have been tested of which 43.270 were tested at the airport. 69 persons lost the battle against Covid-19. Due to the amount of increase in cases these last days the Government of Aruba took some additional measurements in order to stop the spread as quickly as possible.

### Measurement by the Government

### of Aruba

- Curfew is from 12am to 5am.
- Closing time for businesses is 11pm.

### Restaurant rules

- Max four (4) per table indoor and six (6) at a table outdoors.
- No live musicians/entertainment. Liza, volgens mij klopt dit niet mer want er mag 1 volgens mij (Papillon etc hebben live muziek en ook la Cabana...)
- No musical events that are intended to attract customers.
- Background (non-live) music only in restaurants. Liza, check info GOED! Klopt volgens mij niet.
- No dancing.

### Boats on sea

- Maximum 4 persons on boats/yachts.
- Avoid social events on boats.

### Gathering ban

The maximum allowed is increased from 2 people to maximum of 4 people in public areas.

### Shopping

- Only 1 person per family inside stores/supermarkets. Is dit nog steeds want niemand doet dat??
- Masks required inside (Remember – Resort Elevators & hallways are inside areas).
- Use masks when 1.5 meter distance is not possible.

### Social events

- Max 10 inside (if distance is possible) and 25 outside (if distance is possible).
- No contact sports.
- No permits for public events will be granted.
- Police can stop event if there is disorder.

- New legal basis for fines is introduced which allows police to act more effectively against violations.

### Still operative

- Hotels and lodgings are exempted from the closing time, BUT only to serve their registered guests between 10pm and 6am.
- Casinos are not part of the exemption and must close at 11pm.
- Ban on beaches and parking from 7pm to 5am.
- Licensed restaurants on the beach can operate until 10pm – customers to be seated at tables at all times, as per rules.
- Businesses are required to have a compliance officer.
- Business owners are asked to take responsibility for enforcement of rules.

### Advice for travelers

Prior to travel, visitors should download the Aruba Department of Public Health's Aruba Health App: A mobile resource for information on COVID-19 health procedures in Aruba, facilitation of the airport health screening, and faster results for Molecular PCR COVID-19 tests taken in Aruba.

Also as of November 1, 2020 a flat premium of \$30 is applicable for new insurance policies for travelers over 14 years old.

### Testing before your return flight

Effective January 26th, 2021, as announced by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. government will require all international airline passengers to show proof of a negative, PCR or Antigen, Covid-19 test before boarding flights to the United States. In addition, the results of the test must be from no more

than 72 hours prior to departure. For the official CDC announcement: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0112-negative-covid-19-air-passengers.html>.

### What COVID-19 consumer testing facilities are available in Aruba?

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- Horacio Oduber Hospital: (US\$ 75) <https://www.arubahospital.com/> - servicecenter@hoharuba.com - (+297) 597-4522 (Call or WhatsApp)

Check deze info met hun websites of het klopt!!

Get in contact with the test provider to make an appointment, get details on the exact test performed and their procedures.

### Vaccines for Aruba

Aruba received a total of 11.700 Pfizer vaccines as a courtesy of the Dutch Kingdom. The vaccine plan has an eligibility sequence, starting with healthcare workers. Every 3 weeks Aruba is scheduled to receive vaccines, and by June 2021 a total of 85% of the population of Aruba must have received the vaccine. Residents must register to get vaccinated through the Aruba Health App. When vaccinated you still need to adhere to all rules and protocols. Wear your facial mask, practice social distance, and maintain hygiene. The vaccine is not mandatory but, taking the vaccine is encouraged by the authorities.

More information on travel and health requirements can be found on [www.aruba.com](http://www.aruba.com). □

## The Cultural and Creative Industry: It's Time to Invest

Continued from Page 9

We know what it could become, now it is time to join the round table and get business done.

### Moving forward

Fazlagic and Szczepankiewicz state that (2020) "local governments should take a more holistic view while developing their strategies and key performance indicators. The concept of sustainability in a knowledge-based economy should be extended to include social aspects of economic development related to tolerance, climate for doing business, social capital, and local leadership, which are also very important for the growth of local creative industries. Every

local government is a facilitator of change, an employer, and a purchaser of goods and services, so it should be looked upon as an important element of the local creative economy" (p.20).

Aruba has the unique opportunity to boost this sector while we slowly get out of this pandemic. However, we have to invest in this initiative. The government, private sector, NGOs, creative professionals, academia and the civil society all have to invest and do their part. Developing a new economy will only survive through collaboration and action. We want to create positive impact for our Aruban community and my hope is to see this become a reality for our people.

Lastly, Marisa Henderson, Chief of the Creative Economy Programme, and Amy Shelver, Public Information Officer, UNCTAD (2021) once expressed that "impact investing can and will play a critical role in this journey. Investment is the key to unlocking the true potential of the creative industries, and the returns from the creative economy are both promising and multi-dimensional – addressing social, cultural, innovation and economic needs. So, let us turn to creativity and draw on its full spectrum to shape the world while also harnessing its innovation potential and many positive returns. Let the year 2021 mark the dawn of a new era for impact and creativity investment". □



# Biden's \$15 wage proposal: Job killer or a boon for workers?

By **PAUL WISEMAN**

**AP Economics Writer**

**WASHINGTON (AP)** — President Joe Biden's effort to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour could provide a welcome opportunity for someone like Cristian Cardona, a 21-year-old fast food worker. Cardona would love to earn enough to afford to move out of his parents' house in Orlando, Florida, and maybe scrape together money for college.

More than 1,000 miles away in Detroit, Nya Marshall worries that a \$15 minimum wage would drive up her labor costs and perhaps force her to close her 2-year-old restaurant, already under strain from the viral pandemic.

Between Cardona's hope and Marshall's fear lies a roiling public debate, one with enormous consequences for American workers and businesses. Will the Biden administration succeed in enacting a much higher federal minimum wage — and should it? Economists have argued the merits of minimum wage hikes for years. The administration has cast its campaign to raise the minimum as a way to lift up



**Cristian Cardona, right, an employee at a McDonald's, attends a rally for a \$15 an hour minimum wage Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021, in Orlando, Fla.**

millions of the working poor, reduce America's vast financial inequality and help boost the economy.

"No American should work full time and live in poverty," said Rosemary Boeglin, a White House spokeswoman. "Research has shown that raising the minimum wage reduces poverty and has positive economic benefits for workers, their families, their communities, and local businesses."

Yet just this month, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that raising the minimum wage to \$15 by 2025 end 1.4 million jobs as employers cut payrolls to make up for higher labor costs.

The fate of Biden's minimum wage proposal remains hazy. Facing resistance in Congress, the president has acknowledged that he will likely have to omit the measure from the \$1.9 trillion

COVID-19 financial relief package he is proposing and re-introduce it later as a separate bill.

For years, there was almost no debate at all about a minimum wage. Classical economists had standard advice on imposing or raising minimum wages: Don't. Piling higher labor costs on employers, the thinking went, would force them to cut jobs and end up hurting the very low-wage workers

the minimum wage was intended to help.

But groundbreaking research in the 1990s suggested that the Econ 101 version was simplistic at best. Now there is growing confidence among economists — though far from a consensus — that lawmakers can mandate sharp increases in the minimum wage without killing large numbers of jobs.

Assessing Biden's \$15 plan, for instance, economists at Morgan Stanley have concluded that "the impact to employment, positive or negative, would be minimal, while the social benefits to lifting real wages of lower-income earners and millions out of poverty are substantial."

Congress hasn't raised the minimum wage for more than 11 years — the longest gap between increases.

Biden's plan would shake things up. He proposes gradually raising the \$7.25 minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2025, starting with a jump to \$9.50 this year. Thereafter, it would be indexed to grow at the same rate as the U.S. median wage — the point at which half earn more and half earn less. □

**Associated Press**

## New York sues Amazon over worker safety during pandemic

By **MICHELLE CHAPMAN**

**AP Business Writer**

New York is suing Amazon, claiming the company failed to provide workers with a safe environment at two warehouses in the state as COVID-19 infections surged nationwide. The suit from New York Attorney General Letitia James landed just days after Amazon preemptively sued to block the suit over its coronavirus safety protocols and the firing of one of its employees who objected to working conditions.

In the suit filed late Tuesday, New York claims Amazon showed a "flagrant disregard for health and safety requirements" and retaliated illegally against employees who raised



**In this March 30, 2020 file photo, workers at Amazon's fulfillment center in Staten Island, N.Y., gather outside to protest work conditions in the company's warehouse in New York.**

**Associated Press**

alarms.

James opened an investigation into Amazon in March following complaints about the lack of precautions taken to protect employees at New

York facilities amid the pandemic. The investigation concentrated on two facilities — one in Staten Island and one in Queens — with a combined workforce of more than 5,000

individuals. At the time of the complaints, New York City was the epicenter of the U.S. pandemic.

The investigation found evidence showing that Amazon's health and safety response violated state law with respect to cleaning and disinfection protocols, contact tracing, and allowing employees to take precautions to protect themselves from the risk of infection.

The Seattle company has defended its safety practices during the pandemic, saying that it has hired experts for guidance.

"We don't believe the Attorney General's filing presents an accurate picture of Amazon's industry-leading response to the pandemic," Amazon

spokesperson Kelly Nantel said in a statement.

The investigation by the attorney general in New York has grown, looking into whether Amazon unlawfully fired or disciplined employees who reported perceived safety concerns. It focused on two employees, one who was fired and one who received a written warning, after they raised concerns about Amazon's response to the COVID-19 pandemic to managers, made public complaints about Amazon's practices through the media, and submitted complaints to at least one government agency. Amazon has said the employee was fired for violating social-distancing guidelines. □



# EXPLAINER: Topsy-turvy weather comes from polar vortex

By **SETH BORENSTEIN**  
AP Science Writer

It's as if the world has been turned upside-down, or at least its weather. You can blame the increasingly familiar polar vortex, which has brought a taste of the Arctic to places where winter often requires no more than a jacket.

Around the North Pole, winter's ultra-cold air is usually kept bottled up 15 to 30 miles high. That's the polar vortex, which spins like a whirling top at the top of the planet. But occasionally something slams against the top, sending the cold air escaping from its Arctic home and heading south. It's been happening more often, and scientists are still not completely sure why, but they suggest it's a mix of natural random weather and human-caused climate change.

This particular polar vortex breakdown has been a whopper. Meteorologists call it one of the biggest, nastiest and longest-lasting ones they've seen, and they've been watching since at least the 1950s. This week's weather is part of a pattern stretching back to January.

"It's been a major breakdown," said Jennifer Francis, a climate scientist at the Woodwell Climate Research Center on Cape Cod. "It really is the cause of all of these crazy weather



In this Feb. 15, 2021, file photo, icicles form on a citrus tree from a sprinkler system used to protect the trees from the freezing temperatures in Edinburg, Texas.

Associated Press

er events in the Northern Hemisphere."

"It's been unusual for a few weeks now — very, very crazy," Francis said. "Totally topsy-turvy."

## RECORD COLD IN WARMER PLACES

Record subzero temperatures in Texas and Oklahoma knocked millions off the power grid and into deep freezes. A deadly tornado hit North Carolina. Other parts of the South saw thunder snow and reports of something that seemed like a snow tornado but wasn't. Snow fell hard not just in Chicago, but in Greece and Turkey, where it's far

less normal. Record cold also hit Europe this winter, earning the name the "Beast from the East."

"We've had everything you could possibly think of in the past week," said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini, noting that parts of the U.S. have been 50 degrees (28 degrees Celsius) colder than normal. "It's been a wild ride."

It was warmer Tuesday in parts of Greenland, Alaska, Norway and Sweden than in Texas and Oklahoma. And somehow people in South Florida have been complaining about record warmth that is causing plants to bloom early.

In the eastern Greenland town of Tasiilaq, it's been about 18 degrees (10 degrees Celsius) warmer than normal, which "is a bit of a nuisance," said Lars Rasmussen, a museum curator at the local cultural center. "The warm weather makes dog sledding and driving on snow scooters a bit of a hassle." Several meteorologists squarely blamed the polar vortex breakdown or disruption.

These used to happen once every other year or so, but research shows they are now close to happening yearly, if not more, said Judah Cohen, a winter storm expert for Atmo-

spheric Environmental Research, a commercial firm outside of Boston.

## THE SPINNING TOP GETS TOPPLED

The polar vortex spends winter in its normal place until an atmospheric wave the type that brings weather patterns here and there slams into it. Normally such waves don't do much to the strong vortex, but occasionally the wave has enough energy to push the spinning top over, and that's when the frigid air breaks loose, Gensini said. Sometimes, the cold air mass splits into chunks — an event that usually is connected to big snowstorms in the U.S. East, like a few weeks ago. Other times, it just moves to a new place, which often means bitter cold in parts of Europe. This time it did both, Cohen said.

There was a split of the vortex in early January and another in mid-January. Then at the end of January came the displacement that caused cold air to spill into Europe and much of the United States, Cohen said.

Both Cohen and Francis said this should be considered not one but three polar vortex disruptions, though some scientists lump it all together.

While both the vortex and

the wave that bumped it are natural, and polar vortex breakdowns happen naturally, there is likely an element of climate change at work, but it is not a sure thing that science agrees on, Cohen, Gensini and Francis said.

Warming in the Arctic, with shrinking sea ice, is goosing the atmospheric wave in two places, giving it more energy when it strikes the polar vortex, making it more likely to disrupt the vortex, Cohen said.

"There is evidence that climate change can weaken the polar vortex, which allows more chances for frigid Arctic air to ooze into the Lower 48," said University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd.

## PATTERN HAS BEEN OBSERVED FOR DECADES

There were strong polar vortex disruptions and cold outbreaks like this in the 1980s, Cohen said.

"I think it's historic and generational," Cohen said. "I don't think it's unprecedented. This Arctic outbreak has to be thought of in context. The globe is much warmer than it used to be."

It also feels colder because just before the outbreak, much of the United States was experiencing a milder-than-normal winter, with the ground not even frozen on Christmas Day in Chicago, Gensini said.

The globe as a whole is about the same temperature as the average was from 1979 to 2000 for this time of year, according to the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer.

One reason is that it will soon warm back up to normal when the polar vortex returns to its regular home, Cohen said.

As for people thinking this cold outbreak disproves global warming, scientists say that's definitely not so. Even with climate change, "we'll still have winter," said North Carolina state climatologist Kathie Dello. "What we're seeing here is we're pretty unprepared for almost every type of extreme weather. It's pretty sad." □

## Conceptis Sudoku

By Dave Green

		5				2		
	3		9		2		8	
9				1				4
	7						2	
		4				8		
	2						9	
4				7				3
	9		6		4		7	
		3				1		

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**Editor in Chief**

Linda Reijnders  
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Liza Koolman (Management assistant)

**Editors**

Richard Brooks

**Sales**

Linda Reijnders  
(linda.reijnders@cspnv.com)  
Sulaika Croes

**Classifieds**

classified@cspnv.com

**Distribution and Collection**

accounting@bondia.com

**Social / Website**

Juan Luis Pinto  
Pilar Flores

**Columnists**

Anthony Croes  
Joris Zantvoort  
Thais Franken

Weststraat 22  
T: 582-7800  
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# The sweet rise of 'Queen Sugar' director Cierra Glaude

By MESFIN FEKADU

AP Entertainment Writer

**NEW YORK (AP)** — When the Oprah Winfrey Network series "Queen Sugar" debuted in 2016, Cierra Glaude worked as a first team production assistant, an early riser who is responsible for keeping track of the actors on set.

"I'm basically their chaperone, their sister, girlfriend, mom, aunt," she explained. "I know all of their dietary restrictions.

I get them through the day, basically."

In two short years, it marked the third time the young filmmaker had worked with Emmy winner Ava DuVernay, who created "Queen Sugar" and also hired Glaude to work on the Oscar-nominated 2014 film "Selma" as well as her CBS pilot "For Justice."

On "Selma," Glaude was an additional PA working with background actors as they marched on the highway from Selma to Montgomery. She was the director's assistant on "For Justice," where Glaude admits she "made some mistakes that I learned really quickly from."

And on "Queen Sugar," she continued as a first team PA for season two and was promoted to the writer's room during season three. Now she's in the director's chair literally.

Glaude, 29, has directed three episodes for the show's fifth season, which premieres Tuesday at 8 p.m. ET.

"I'll just be walking around the house like, 'Wait a minute.'

I find a mirror and go, 'You're a director,'" Glaude said in an interview with The Associated Press. "It does feel like such a dream. Sometimes I'm like, 'I can't believe this is all happening still.' It's really lovely."

"Queen Sugar" follows three siblings from Louisiana who manage a sugarcane farm left to them after their father died and is based off the 2014 novel of the same name. Its debut season won outstanding drama series at the 2017



Director Cierra Glaude poses for a portrait in Glendale, Calif. on Feb. 4, 2021.

Associated Press

NAACP Image Awards.

During the first season, DuVernay encouraged Glaude to shoot and produce her own material so she could one day direct on her set.

Glaude made her directorial debut in 2017 with the short "Last Looks," which starred "Queen Sugar" and "True Blood" actor Rutina Wesley and aired on Issa Rae's YouTube channel. Glaude was selected by Emmy winner Lena Waithe for the AT&T Hello Labs Filmmaker Mentorship Program, for which she directed the short "Spilt Milk," starring "Orange Is the New Black" actor Dascha Polanco.

She also directed music videos, including "High Rises" for breakthrough rapper Chika, who earned a best new artist Grammy nomination this year.

"All three of us the director, the DP (director of photography) and the talent we were all queer Black women from Alabama. That was really dope," she said.

Glaude also built her production muscles by working on the hit 2017 film "Girls

Trip"; 2018's "A Wrinkle in Time," which DuVernay directed; and "Twenties," Waithe's BET series that launched last year.

That's when DuVernay knew Glaude was ready to sit in one of her director's chairs.

"When I met (Cierra) she was a student who left school for the opportunity to work on set. She made that decision for herself that she could get the degree in Alabama and still be struggling to get on a set, or she could leave the degree and just get on a set. ...She was the key PA on 'Queen Sugar' for a long time. That means she's first in, three o'clock in the morning, four o'clock in the morning, last one out for years and years and years.

For her to be able to go back on that show and be the director is enough to make me weep if I think about it for too long," DuVernay told the AP.

"I know what she did to get there."

Though Glaude dropped out of the University of Alabama to officially pur-

sue her film career, she's earned a degree of sorts from what could be considered the School of Ava DuVernay.

Take "Queen Sugar," for instance, where DuVernay has created a series where every episode is directed by a woman. So far, 37 female filmmakers have had the chance to direct TV episodes thanks to the utopia DuVernay fashioned, 34 of whom made their television directorial debut on the series.

And the alumnae have advanced to great heights, including Victoria Mahoney, the first woman to direct a "Star Wars" film; Amanda Marsalis has gone on to direct episodes of "Ozark," "Westworld" and "The Umbrella Academy"; and Salli Richardson-Whitfield, the actor-turned-director, recently signed an overall deal with HBO.

"The point that we're making is all these decades y'all just been hiring the same men and the same kind of way to make a good show. We're going to hire all

women and the same kind of women and we can also make a good show to stand as an example," DuVernay said.

"For decades and decades when we've been told that this is the only way 'Sugar' stands as an example that was never true.

It was a myth and it's been busted, and it's been broken."

The return of "Queen Sugar," where the casting, post-production and music supervision departments are headed by women, comes at a historical time in Hollywood for female directors: For the first time ever, three women are nominated for best director at the 2020 Golden Globes, which will air Feb. 28.

"It's overdue, so it's bittersweet," said DuVernay, who was the last woman nominated for best director at the Globes before Regina King, Chloé Zhao and Emerald Fennell picked up nominations this year.

"It's kind of like an eyeroll and a nod at the same time. That's great, but how about all the other 100 years before that? At this moment we celebrate these three women, but we (do) say, 'This is crazy.' You've got to do both at the same time."

Opportunity is at the center of the environment or school that DuVernay has manifested and produced with "Queen Sugar," and it has given Glaude a chance to say four words not often and easily said by Black women: "I feel very seen."

"It's really just surreal," she added. "It's a gang of badass women.

You can't help but be enriched and inspired by that." □

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7	6	3	8	9	5	1	4	2

Difficulty Level ★★★

2/18



# USA Basketball called Isaiah Thomas, who hopes NBA does next

By TIM REYNOLDS

There was a day last spring when Isaiah Thomas noticed he could lift his leg without any pain. That hadn't happened in years. This weekend, he plans to show the NBA what that means for his game.

More than a year removed from his last NBA appearance, and nine months after surgery that he says fixed a bone-on-bone condition in his right hip, Thomas has games to play. The two-time All-Star is suiting up with USA Basketball for a pair of FIBA AmeriCup qualifying games in San Juan, Puerto Rico — and Thomas expects NBA teams to be watching.

"My ultimate goal is to play in the NBA as soon as possible," Thomas, 32, told The Associated Press. "This allows me to compete against other professionals, represent my country at the same time — which is an honor and a privilege — and ultimately show NBA teams that I'm back to myself and I'm 100% healthy. That's why I chose to come here. When Team USA brought it to me, it was a no-brainer."

The games technically don't mean much to the U.S.; the Americans already have qualified for the AmeriCup tournament that will take place in September 2022. But to Thomas, the matchups against the Bahamas on Friday and Mexico on Saturday mean plenty.

"My skill didn't go anywhere," Thomas said. "The biggest question was



Boston Celtics guard Isaiah Thomas (4) drives to the basket past Miami Heat center Hassan Whiteside (21) during the second half of an NBA basketball game in Miami, in this Nov. 28, 2016, file photo.

Associated Press

whether I am 100% healthy. I am now, so why not show it on a stage with 'USA' across your chest?"

Thomas is part of a U.S. roster loaded with NBA veterans for these two qualifying games. Joe Johnson is on the team, as is Brandon Bass, and there are five more players besides Thomas with some degree of experience within the league.

Typically, U.S. rosters for these qualifying games are almost entirely composed of G League players, names that aren't exactly of the household variety. The NBA names add tons of intrigue, as does Thomas' return to game action.

"Isaiah, he's got a spirit

about him, a love for the game that I've seen not only from the conversations that I had with him before we arrived, but even since we've been practicing," said Joe Prunty, who will lead the U.S. coaching staff in these two games. "He has looked good."

Johnson — the 39-year-old who scored 20,405 points in his 17 NBA seasons — offered even more praise after seeing Thomas in practices this week.

"He looks great," Johnson said. "One thing I'll say: In pick and rolls, I think he's probably going to be unstoppable. Bigs, I don't know what they'll do. Do you get out and hedge? He'll go around you and

split you. Do you try to catch him? He'll pull up for the jumper. He has a great arsenal. It's been fun to watch him play, man. I will tell you that."

Thomas last played on Feb. 3, 2020, for Washington. He was traded to the Los Angeles Clippers three days later, then waived, and hasn't appeared in an NBA game since. The hip surgery — resurfacing, it's called — was performed three months later, and Thomas said the hip felt better immediately.

So now, he's plotting another way to defy the odds. He was the No. 60, and last, pick in the 2011 draft. The other 73 final picks — granted, the draft used

to include more than 200 players — have combined to score 6,644 points, while Thomas' NBA total is 9,508. He heard plenty of times that at 5-foot-9 he was too short for the NBA; he averaged 28.9 points for Boston in 2016-17, the most ever in league history for someone his height.

"I've already proven who I am," Thomas said. "I still love the game. I just need an opportunity."

The 2017 season is when four years of pain, both physical and personal, started. On the eve of the Celtics' playoff opener, sister Chyna died in a car crash. Thomas played on, scoring 53 points in a second-round game on what would have been his sister's 23rd birthday. But the hip issues already had started, and Thomas was shut down later that postseason.

That summer, he was traded to Cleveland for Kyrie Irving. Nothing has been the same since; he's appeared in only 84 games, averaging 12.8 points.

G League teams talked to him about playing this season; that was never a serious consideration for Thomas. When USA Basketball called, he leaped at the chance.

"I'm as good now as I've been in any point in the last three years," Thomas said. "Playing for USA Basketball is going to allow teams to see the way that I'm moving, the way that I'm playing, that I am back to myself, back to being the player that everyone is accustomed to seeing.□"

## Husband of Iran's ski coach bars her from leaving country

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — The Iranian women's alpine ski team flew on Wednesday to Italy for the world championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo without their coach, whose husband has barred her from leaving the country, Iranian media reported.

The reports by the semi-official ISNA news agency and the pro-reform Shargh daily did not provide any

details as to why Samira Zargari's husband had not allowed her to leave. Iran's ski federation also did not offer any information. Under Iranian law, husbands can stop their wives from traveling outside of the country.

Zargari is not the first married athlete whose husband prevented her from leaving Iran. In 2015, soccer player Niloufar Arda-

lan missed the Asian Cup tournament in futsal — an indoor version of soccer — after her husband confiscated her passport in a domestic dispute.

Women's sports largely disappeared from Iran after the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Over time, however, women's sports gained in popularity, especially soccer. Social customs still come

into the game though, as the country's soccer team plays its games with players' hair covered by traditional headscarves, or hijabs.

Two Islamic countries make the headscarf mandatory for women in public — Iran and Saudi Arabia. FIFA overturned a yearlong ban against players wearing hijabs in 2012.

Four Iranian skiers are en-

tered for the women's giant slalom race on Thursday at the world championships in Cortina d'Ampezzo: Atefeh Ahmadi, Sadaf Savehshemshaki, Forough Abbasi and Marjan Kalhor. They are part of a 99-skier field for a race in which the favorites are Marta Bassino and Federica Brignone of host Italy, Petra Vlhova of Slovakia and Mikaela Shiffrin of the United States.□



# Muchova upsets Barty and will face Brady in Australian semis



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas reacts after defeating Spain's Rafael Nadal in their quarterfinal match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021.

Associated Press

**MELBOURNE, Australia (AP)** — Top-ranked Ash Barty built a big lead in the Australian Open quarterfinals before her opponent took a medical timeout and left the court. More than an hour later, it was Barty heading abruptly for the exit, upset 1-6, 6-3, 6-2 Wednesday by 25th-seeded Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic. Muchova earned her first semifinal berth at a Grand Slam tournament and ended Barty's bid to become the first Australian woman to win the title at home since Chris O'Neil in 1978.

"It's heartbreaking, of course," said Barty, who took nearly all of last year off because of the coronavi-

rus pandemic, including opting not to try to defend her 2019 French Open title. "But the sun will come up tomorrow. You're either winning or you're learning, and today is a massive learning curve for me."

No. 2-ranked Rafael Nadal built a big lead in a night-time quarterfinal, but his bid for a men's-record 21st Grand Slam title ended with an upset five-set loss to Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece.

It is only the second time in Nadal's career he has lost a Grand Slam match after taking the opening two

Now the 22-year-old, fifth-seeded Tsitsipas will try to reach his first major final by beating Daniil Med-

vedev on Friday. The women's semifinals Thursday will be the first matches at Melbourne Park with crowds in nearly a week after the easing of restrictions imposed by the Victoria state government during a five-day lockdown in Australia's second-largest city to contain the spread of a COVID-19 cluster. Tournament director Craig Tiley said Wednesday that attendance will be capped at 7,477 — about half the capacity of Rod Laver Arena — for each of the last four days of the tournament.

Muchova's opponent will be 22nd-seeded Jennifer Brady, who beat fellow American and good friend Jessica Pegula 4-6, 6-2, 6-1. Brady reached her second Grand Slam semifinal, following a run that far at the U.S. Open in September.

"I hope I make it a habit," Brady said. "Hopefully I have a new habit of making finals."

She struggled at times and gave her racket an angry toss midway through the second set. But the unseeded Pegula, who advanced beyond the third round at a major for the first time, appeared to tire down the stretch.

"We're such good friends," Brady said. "I'm really happy for her success. I know we'll be having a lot more tough battles."

Medvedev beat Andrey Rublev, his friend and teammate on Russia's ATP Cup-winning squad, by a 7-5, 6-3, 6-2 score and will take a 19-match winning streak into the semifinals.

"It's never easy," Medvedev said about playing a pal. "But, I mean, we're all so competitive. During the match, you can see nothing matters. Just need to win."

The No. 4-seeded Medvedev hasn't dropped a set to No. 7-seeded Rublev in four tour-level matches. That includes their meeting in the U.S. Open quarterfinals last year.

Medvedev called for the trainer after the match to massage his left thigh as he sat in a court-side chair before a TV interview.

"I started cramping. I knew he was cramping, also," Medvedev said. "At the end, I locked completely."

Medvedev is into the semifinals of a major for the third time and is one of two Russians into the semifinals at Melbourne Park. He joins 114th-ranked Aslan Karatsev, a qualifier in the main draw of a major for the first time, who plays top-ranked Novak Djokovic for a spot in the final. Muchova played poorly at the start of her second major quarterfinal, and Barty raced to a 5-0 lead while losing only six points. After nine games, Muchova had one

winner and 18 unforced errors.

Early in the second set, she took a medical timeout that lasted nearly 10 minutes, which players are allowed to do if it's determined they're having a problem that goes beyond cramps.

Sunny weather, with the temperature in the mid-80s (30 degrees Celsius), was a factor, Muchova said.

"I think it was a bit of the heat," she said. "It got to me, and I was feeling kind of dizzy, really lost and almost fainting. I just asked for help."

Medical personnel took her temperature, checked her blood pressure and gave her ice before she left the court. When Muchova returned, she played much better.

"I tried to play a bit faster rallies so we don't play long ones as in the first set," she said, "and it worked well."

Barty had no complaints about Muchova halting play.

"It's within the rules," Barty said. "She's within her rights to take that time. That shouldn't be a massive turning point in the match. I'm disappointed I let that be a turning point."

Comebacks have been a staple in the tournament for Muchova, who rallied in earlier matches to win sets after trailing 5-0 and 4-0.

Against Barty, she began moving into the court to hit her groundstrokes earlier. Barty, pushed behind the baseline, became indecisive and erratic.

During one stretch, Muchova won eight of nine games. Barty finished with 37 unforced errors and lost serve four times in the final two sets. "I just overplayed," Barty said. "I just pressed a little bit too much, and gave up too many cheap errors at some pretty critical times."

Brady was in a two-week hard lockdown before the Australian Open because she was among the players who shared a charter flight to Australia with someone who later tested positive for COVID-19.

The tradeoff for that initially was some freedom of movement in Australia.

Crowds of up to 30,000 a day, roughly 50% of what's normally seen at the tournament, were allowed into Melbourne Park — although the daily attendance never topped 22,500 — before the lockdown was imposed.

This was the first Grand Slam tournament since last year's Australian Open to permit thousands of people to sit in the stands.

Wimbledon was canceled, the U.S. Open barred fans entirely, and the French Open let about 1,000 spectators per day. □